



Town of Groton, Connecticut

Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

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Mayor Harry A. Watson, Councilors Peter J. Bartinik, Jr., Natalie Burfoot Billing, Heather Sherman Bond, Catherine Kolnaski, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Paulann H. Sheets, Thomas J. Skrmetti, and Elissa T. Wright.

Tuesday, October 11, 2005

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

SPECIAL MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watson called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Skrmetti
Members Absent: Councilor Wright

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnyan.

3. Calendar and Communications

Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent noted items distributed to the Committee prior to the meeting:

- CCM's testimony re: eminent domain
- A memorandum from Town Attorney Mike Carey regarding the alcohol ordinance
- Information requested by Councilor Sheets on solid waste
- An article on an ethics problem in Plainfield

Councilor Sheets received two e-mails asking not to terminate the pumpout boat program. She then distributed an e-mail she received from Ed Johnson that was sent to Town Manager Mark Oefinger. The Town Manager noted the issue regarding a tree in Noank has been brought to CL&P's attention and the Traffic Authority has looked at signs in Noank. With respect to Mr. Johnson's third issue, vandalism in Noank, the Town Manager does not have any further information.

Councilor Billing received communications in support of continuing and discontinuing the pumpout boat service.

Councilor Bond asked for a referral on the energy assistance program and expansion of the program. Mayor Watson made a referral to the Committee of the Whole.

4. Approval of Minutes

2005-0247

Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of August 23, 2005 and September 13, 2005 are hereby accepted and approved.

Discussed

Councilor Sheets requested a modification to the discussion under 2005-0166 Great Brook Subdivision Environmental Covenants in the August 23rd minutes.

A motion was made by Councilor Skrmetti, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., to adopt as modified.

The motion carried unanimously.

2005-0270 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole of September 27, 2005 are hereby accepted and approved.

Discussed

Councilor Sheets requested a modification to the discussion under 2005-0166 Great Brook Subdivision Environmental Covenants in the September 27th minutes.

A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., seconded by Councilor Billing, to adopt as modified.

The motion carried unanimously.

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS

2005-0261 Mystic River Pumpout Boat Program

Recommended for a Resolution

This item was referred back to the Committee of the Whole for further deliberation on the merits of continuing the program on a contractual basis if a contractor can be found and the grant secured. The Town Manager suggested defining a "not to exceed" cost to determine the Town's exposure. Councilor Bond suggested that Town staff speak directly to Mr. Huntley of DEP regarding a possible contractor.

Councilor Billing asked if using a contractor would relieve the pressure on Public Works staff time. Director of Public Works Gary Schneider stated there would be less work for staff because the contractor will be required to meet the grant specifications. The grant must be submitted by the end of November and the grant amount can be amended. Mr. Schneider recommended that the Town apply for the grant, but not go out to bid until the grant dollars are in hand. Councilor Billing asked what would happen if the program is not run well due to employee issues, and Mr. Schneider explained that it would be the responsibility of the contractor to meet the obligation. The contractor may have a larger pool of employees to pull from than the Town does.

Councilor Skrmetti stated he is not sure if the Town should be participating in an area where there is private enterprise working. He asked what would happen to the program if there are no bids. Mr. Schneider explained that the fact that the Town already operates a boat that is owned by the DEP may lead to more bidders than expected.

A motion was made by Councilor Billing, seconded by Councilor Bond, to rescind the previous motion to terminate the pumpout boat program and to recommend a resolution authorizing staff to apply for a grant from the state to continue the pumpout boat program through a private contractor.

Councilor Billing clarified that her support of this motion does not mean that she would support continuation of this program if a contractor can not be secured or the grant is not awarded.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 7 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Sheets
Opposed: 1 - Councilor Skrmetti

2005-0127 Energy Conservation Policy

Discussed

operations. He explained that the CIP has always included a review of how Town buildings are functioning as well as a repair/replacement program for major mechanical systems. He cited the energy savings associated with the replacement of the boiler at the Senior Center. Any new equipment installed by the Town is energy star rated. The Town also looks at the condition of building envelopes (roofs, windows, etc.). A full renovation addresses the building envelope and systems, and the Town takes advantage of CL&P energy conservation grants when available.

Street lights have been replaced with high pressure sodium lights resulting in a three-year payoff. Only security lighting is used in parking lots overnight. Where possible, the Town combines functions in one location. There will be substantial savings resulting from the renovation of the schools. The Town is in the process of replacing fluorescent light fixtures with energy star rated fixtures. Another component of energy conservation is reviewing the rates being charged for each building by CL&P and Groton Utilities to verify accuracy, and monitoring heating oil consumption and billing.

For Fleet, scheduled maintenance is a very important factor. Recently, the Town started sending out a mechanic to check tire pressures on Town vehicles and fill the tires as necessary. The Town is looking at purchasing hybrid vehicles and monitors fuel consumption.

Within Town buildings, the temperature is kept within an industry accepted comfort range. The Town uses heat recovery systems where possible. Best Management Practices followed include reducing usage and increasing efficiency; optimizing use of environmental management systems; documenting to identify problems; conducting preventive and operational maintenance on systems; and utilizing automatic environmental control as much as possible.

Future projects include evaluating Town Hall and turning the air system over to an environmental management system. The worst building for energy conservation is the Shennecossett Golf Course clubhouse. Improvements are being made to the Human Services building. The existing maintenance buildings are very drafty because of the garage doors and modernized buildings would improve energy consumption.

Wes Greenleaf, Director of Buildings and Grounds for the Board of Education, addressed the schools. The schools use an average of a half-gallon of fuel per square foot, which is good by industry standards. Problems have to do with the age of the structures, old windows, and lack of insulation. The attempt to conserve energy is complicated by the temperature differential at the windows versus the centers of the classrooms. The schools converted to #2 heating oil from #4 and #6, which has conserved a significant amount of fuel. As roofs are replaced, they are insulated to the extent possible. The school system has also taken advantage of CL&P grants. Light fixtures have been converted to modern fixtures with automatic controls, which has slowed the increase in electric costs. Mr. Greenleaf noted that the school buildings are being used more than ever. Digital temperature controls have been installed in all buildings and there is a full-time technician available during the heating season to monitor temperatures. The school buildings need a lot of work and the question is energy costs versus how much to spend on improving the buildings. With the rising cost of fuel oil, more will probably be spent on building upgrades.

Future initiatives include boiler and window replacements, and the school system has experimented with CO2 monitoring to control ventilation. The Pleasant Valley School frame building will be closed. Room lighting is controlled by outside light levels and timers. The Board routinely sends a conservation letter to employees reminding them of energy saving measures. The schools are continually recalibrating heating control systems for efficiency. Also, all steam traps in the district have been repaired or replaced in the last three years.

Councilor Bond asked for estimates on fuel consumption when the new schools are completed.

Mr. Greenleaf noted that it is too early to estimate those figures. He noted that the improvements will result in more even temperatures in the rooms, but there will probably not be a cost decrease per square foot because the new buildings include ventilation, which existing buildings do not have.

Mayor Watson asked about the contract for school buses. Mr. Greenleaf explained that the fuel is purchased by the Board of Education and the contractor operates the buses. A new procedure has been implemented whereby buses turn off their engines when in front of buildings. The bus company does bus maintenance.

Councilor Sheets asked for the fuel usage figures for school buses and Mr. Greenleaf indicated he would provide them. She also asked about the Town's consumption. Mr. Schneider responded that in FYE 04, the Town consumed 70,744 gallons (including 9,800 for Freeman Hathaway), or about \$3 per square foot of buildings. The Police Station is the biggest user because it is a 24/7 operation. The biggest portion of Town bills is associated with electric service.

Discussion followed on the purchase of fuel and heating oil. The Board of Education has left the consortium that the Town belongs to. The consortium has not locked in a price this year. Mr. Greenleaf noted that the opportunity to lock in for the schools is July 1st and the Board of Education also decided not to lock in at that time. Councilor Sheets asked for information on why the Board of Education left the consortium, and Mr. Greenleaf indicated he will provide information on this issue from Hugh Hunter, the Business Manager.

By consensus, the Committee decided to consider 2005-0199 Town Manager Annual Evaluation next on the agenda.

2005-0199**Town Manager Annual Evaluation**

A motion was made by Councilor Billing, seconded by Councilor Bartinik, Jr., to enter executive session at 7:20 p.m. to discuss 2005-0199 Town Manager Annual Evaluation.

The motion carried unanimously.

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 7:46 p.m.

Recommended for a Resolution

A motion was made by Mayor Watson, seconded by Councilor Billing, to recommend a resolution rating the Town Manager's performance as "exceeds expectations" and reflecting a 3% increase in salary.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 6 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Billing, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Skrmetti
Opposed: 2 - Councilor Bond and Councilor Sheets

The Committee of the Whole meeting recessed at 7:50 p.m. to conduct the special meeting of the Town Council. The Committee of the Whole meeting reconvened at 7:53 p.m.

2005-0231**Regional Sewer System Issues**

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted there have been preliminary discussions with Stonington concerning the possibility of Stonington tying into the Groton sewer system. Staff recommends that at a minimum, a joint meeting with the Stonington Board of Selectmen and Water Pollution Control Authority be held to discuss the issues.

Councilor Skrmetti suggested again that the City be included in any discussions of regional sewer systems. The Town Manager noted the primary purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues

specific to Stonington. Councilor O'Beirne suggested that technical information such as capacity, generation rates, etc. be distributed in advance of the meeting so that philosophy can be discussed at the meeting. Town Manager Oefinger agreed to provide whatever information is available.

The Town Manager explained that there are a number of specifics that would have to be worked out such as the current and future cost of the capacity. However, the Town must first have a discussion and decide if this is even an arrangement that would be desirable to pursue. The Town Manager will schedule a joint meeting of the parties in November.

The Town Manager directed the Council's attention to a memo from Public Works regarding the Water Pollution Control Facility Upgrade. He suggested that the Town Council and the Water Pollution Control Authority meet on October 25th. Councilor O'Beirne asked the Town Manager to consider writing a letter to the new DEP Commissioner asking for a meeting to discuss the delay.

2003-0198 Public Water & Sewer on Flanders Road/Industrial area

Discussed

The draft report is expected in mid-November. Town Manager Oefinger stated he would provide color copies of the report to the Council.

2004-0308 Alcohol Possession By Minors

Recommended for a Resolution

The Committee received a revised version of the Ordinance addressing Town Attorney Mike Carey's comments.

A motion was made by Councilor Billing, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to recommend a resolution adopting the revised Ordinance Regarding Alcohol Possession by Minors.

Councilor Sheets expressed concern with the lack of a clear requirement that the host have knowledge or reasonable knowledge of the gathering and consumption of alcohol.

A motion was made by Councilor Sheets, seconded by Councilor Bond, to amend the motion to add the following language to the revised ordinance:

Section 3: DEFINITIONS, HOST - append the definition with "at which the host knows or should know that alcohol is consumed by a minor or minors."

Section 5: HOSTING EVENTS - modify the first line to read "No person shall host an event or gathering at which the host knows or should know that alcohol is consumed by or dispensed to any minor.."

Councilor Bartinik feels that laws like this should be enacted by the state.

The motion to amend carried by the following vote:

In Favor: 7 - Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Skrmetti, Mayor Watson

Opposed: 1 - Councilor Bartinik, Jr.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 7 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Billing, Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr., Councilor Sheets and Councilor Skrmetti

Opposed: 1 - Councilor Bartinik, Jr.

2004-0048 Groton Code of Ethics

Discussed

Councilor Bond asked that discussion of this item be postponed. Assistant to the Town Manager

Lee Vincent expressed concern with the appearance that there is a code of ethics on the docket. He noted that Councilor Wright's version is nearly identical to the state's version, the shortcomings of which have been mentioned numerous times. In fact, the state had already made changes to this version by the end of last year's session.

Councilor Billing suggested that if this is going to move forward, it will have to be referred out to a subcommittee that can work on it for an extended period. She asked Mr. Vincent if other towns' ordinances were provided to the entire Council. She cited the Town of Orange's code and encouraged Councilors to review it.

Further discussion of this item was tabled to another time.

2005-0262 Possibility of Groton Joining Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger noted this group is attempting to increase educational cost sharing funding for municipalities and they are considering filing suit against the state. There are indications that the Governor's office may meet with this group. The group has offered to meet with the Town Council and Board of Education and the Town Manager would recommend a joint meeting. Councilor Bartinik reviewed the group's website and he stated he is cautious. They are proposing litigation for something that should happen through the political process. Also, the group's membership appears to be made up of teachers' unions, which have an interest in keeping salaries high. Councilor Billing requested this referral because of materials received from this group and she feels this group has a better chance of succeeding at property tax reform than other groups. Councilor Bond would like more information on the group before joining. Councilor Skrmetti suggested that the issue be discussed at the Town Council/RTM/Board of Education Liaison meeting. Councilor Sheets supported the idea of having a presentation by the group. Town Manager Oefinger noted that he agrees philosophically with Councilor Bartinik, but there has been no movement on this issue in the legislature.

Councilor Billing indicated that this group has been working within the political system and their membership also includes a number of municipalities.

2005-0272 Naming of Copp Property Dog Park Recommended for a Resolution

Town Manager Oefinger met with Director of Parks and Recreation John Silsby and discovered that no one had reached out to the Copp Board on this issue. Dave Winkler is now querying the Board about their desire to be involved in this decision. Councilor Bartinik suggested the park should have a serious name, and he suggested other organizations that do things with dogs, such as the Lions Club, could be involved in the naming. Councilor Kolnaski noted that the community was involved in suggesting names. Councilor Bond stated there is a Bark Park in Norwich. She asked how much will be spent on the sign. Councilor Billing asked if Glenna Doyle has been asked about the name for the park.

A motion was made by Councilor Skrmetti, seconded by Councilor Kolnaski, to recommend a resolution dedicating the dog park to Glenna Doyle and to name it Central Bark, pending input from the Copp Board.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 6 - Mayor Watson, Councilor Bartinik, Jr., Councilor Bond, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Skrmetti
Opposed: 1 - Councilor Billing
Abstain: 1 - Councilor Sheets

2005-0267 Acceptance of Open Space at Way Subdivision Recommended for a Resolution

Oefinger noted it is contiguous to existing open space.

A motion was made by Councilor Bond, seconded by Councilor Sheets, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously.

2005-0263

Town Clerk Compensation

Not Discussed

Consideration of this item was tabled to the next meeting.

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

Councilor Billing asked about two SCCOG items - the regional dog pound and regional funding for the homeless shelter in New London. Town Manager Oefinger noted there is a referral on the dog pound in the Public Works Committee. Town Manager Oefinger provided a brief update on the shelter issue. There will be further discussions on this issue, and there is no need for a referral at this time.

Councilor Bartinik suggested the Town Council make a statement to legislators regarding the property tax issue. The Town Manager encouraged the Council to sit down with legislators as soon as possible to address meaningful tax reform. Councilor Sheets suggested that the first step in the process is campaign finance reform.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Councilor Bartinik, seconded by Councilor Skrmetti, to adjourn at 8:58 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.